

STATE OF THE COUNTY SPEECH

Irving Berlin once said, “The toughest thing about success is that you’ve got to keep on being successful . . .” Such is the challenge for Williamson County in 2004/05. Through the efforts of the Budget Committee, which includes Chairman Russell Little, John Hancock, Cheryl Wilson, Greg Davis and myself, 12 School Board members, and 23 of the 24 County Commissioners present, the vote was unanimous to leave the Property Tax rate at the same level as last year. Yes, the Wheel Tax and the Adequate Privilege Tax were increased; but, the property tax was untouched.

During the budget process, the method utilized is the same method

you and I utilize in our businesses and everyday life . . . we size up the situation; calculate the risks involved; estimate our ability to deal with each; and then make our plans.

The population of Williamson County continues to increase, as all of us know:

- In approximately three weeks when school opens, the student population is estimated at 23,670; an increase of 1350 over the same time last year;
- As a percentage to total expenditures, Williamson County Schools will be receiving more than 60% of the total budget dollars, (\$156,288,000 to \$260,100,000). For the first time in

modern history the school budget crosses the 60% threshold.

- The demands for facilities and improvements are increasing; however, they are not increasing faster than our overall budget or our tax base. The facility demand is proportional to our overall growth as a county. As a result, Williamson County enjoys the recognition of having the strongest bond rating of any county in the State of Tennessee.

Let's continue by reviewing a few unique facts that make our County the best place to live in Tennessee:

- In 1996, 58% of debt was for school projects. As of June 30, 2004, again 58% of the debt is for school projects which

continue to be the dominant requirements of the financing program.

- From 1996 to 2003, the County's debt increased by more than 105%, but not faster than other counties. During that same time period, the appraised value of the tax base increased by more than 135% and the assessed value of the County's Tax Base increased by more than 165%.
- Because the County's tax base is growing faster than the County's debt, the County's direct debt-to-value ratios or "debt burden" ratios are declining.
- From 1996 to 2003 the County's direct debt as a percentage

of the appraised tax base declined from 2.74% to 2.41%.

During this same period, the direct debt as a percentage of the assessed tax base declined from 10.8% to 8.4%.

- Again, from 1996 to 2003 the Commercial/Industrial portion of our tax base grew from 24.3% to 31.1%. This growth reduces the tax burden on the residential and farm areas of our county.
- Likewise, from 1996 to 2003 the direct debt as a percentage of assessed residential and farm property declined from 16.1% to 13.1%.
- In 1996 debt services represented approximately 16.8% of

the County's operating budget (excluding capital outlay). In 2003, debt service accounted for approximately 13.1% of the operating budget.

- In 1996, more than 30% of our property tax rate was for debt service. In 2003, approximately 25% of our property tax rate was for debt service.
- Although debt per capita rose approximately 55% from 1996 to 2003, assessed value per capita increased by 100% during that same time period.
- The County has a predetermined repayment schedule for the existing debt. The County will retire more than \$20 million

per year for the next 15 years. More than \$100 million (or 30% of existing debt) is scheduled to be retired over the next five years.

Other notable extracts during the year:

- Privilege tax collections again were up due to the strong building community and the growth. In fact, our total collections since 1988 are more than \$55 million with schools receiving \$45 million of that amount. The Parks & Recreation and the Highway Departments follow with more than \$4.5 million each.
- County General fund balances are adequate throughout all

the different funds at \$61,000,000 (+). In fact, three weeks ago at the close of our Fiscal Year, we had made up our entire projected and planned fund balance spending of \$13,922,200 . . . a very solid ending.

- After nearly 18 months of monitoring, changing and reviewing, the PPO Plan of the Health Insurance Program is in the black, performing and trending outside the norm of most plans. We actually reduced the employee cost/premium to government and schools, by \$250.00 per member, for a total of more than \$900,000. Likewise, our 225+ retirees enjoyed the same cost reduction changes.

As we have seen by Moody's rating, we are financially strong, as are our sister cities. Even though the need exists to create more jobs for our County, the unemployment rate continues to be the lowest in the state. Several new major corporations, as well as other new businesses, continue to locate within our boundaries. Many of us are working hard to have new businesses located in Williamson County. Likewise, we are working hard to retain those businesses and firms that are already here. Make no mistake, each and every business that is located here in Williamson County is important . . . and I will work tirelessly to keep them here.

In reviewing this past 12 months, many items are notable:

- The Life Science Building is thrusting ahead and should be open mid-to-late 2005. What an investment of time and energy by those who had a vision several years ago in our County. Thank you Dr. Lynch, Vanderbilt and Bob Iannacone.
- A Storm Water Committee has been meeting monthly to satisfy the federal guidelines by late 2005 or early 2006. Many countless hours of work have been invested to satisfy the federal requirements. At the same time the committee is being sensitive to the County residents and businesses.
- In the fall of 2003, a group of men and women convened to

begin the process of reinstating an old program; it has been 50+ years since a County Fair was held in Williamson County. Pam Ashworth and Dave Crouch stepped forward to serve, accompanied by almost 150 other folks to make the idea a reality. They are focused on August 2005 as the date for this great event. You will hear and see more about this excitement during the months ahead! We are expecting this to be a huge success for our entire County!

- Earlier this year, under the Homeland Security Program out of Washington and Nashville, a new program was created in Williamson County under the oversight of the Mayors of

Davidson, Sumner, Wilson and Williamson. More than \$5 million in Federal Grants have been earmarked in the areas of law enforcement, fire, medical disaster and response. Expectations are high for our own EMA Director, Mike Thompson, to guide this program and provide a safer place to live, work and raise our families.

- In the spring of this year, after eight long years, the Water and Wastewater Authority finalized plans to help families in the Grassland area with failing sewer systems. With the County Commission funding this new request, four subdivisions of homeowners will be able to enjoy a better

way of life in the next 18-24 months.

- ...and what about that beautiful new Judicial Center downtown? Under the direction of the Special Courthouse committee, led by County Commission Chairman Houston Naron, a new beginning for our Judicial Center was created. There are so many people to thank for this successful accomplishment. It would be impossible to thank each individual. But certainly, it could not have been possible without the partnership with the City of Franklin.
- And finally, Williamson Medical Center—with the \$70 million new additional investment . . . although David Buchanan will not be present to cut the ribbon, his presence,

his dream, and his leadership will be forever visible in this state of the art medical center. Dennis Miller, his team and the Board of Trustees are to be complimented highly for this vision and forward thinking.

In conclusion, with the uncertainty of the Nashville climate for local State shared revenues, and the tightening of Federal dollars, the only constant is evolving change. Williamson County is positioned solidly. We have excellent people and a willingness to meet the future. There is a passion in Williamson County Government in meeting Mr. Berlin's statement and challenge, "We will keep on being successful . . .

”

###

/cb